



# MARY LOU DICKERSON

State Representative • 36th Legislative District



## 2002 Legislative Wrap-up

Dear Friends,

Nearly all of the newspaper and T.V. news stories about the 2002 legislative session focused on the progress we made on transportation and the choices we made to address a \$1.5 billion budget deficit without a tax increase. These are also the biggest items in this newsletter.

I wish I had space to discuss some of the other important accomplishments of the 60-day session that most people haven't read about or seen on T.V.

- Historic drug-court legislation will emphasize treatment instead of imprisonment for non-violent drug offenders, which is our best hope of ending the cycle of addiction..
- The strongest credit scoring reforms in the nation will end the insurance company practice of using consumer credit histories as a reason to cancel insurance policies.
- Unemployment insurance reforms will save Washington businesses \$157 million.
- An objective statement of the fiscal impact of all public initiatives will appear in the voter's pamphlet. 36<sup>th</sup> District residents strongly supported this initiative reform.

Please contact me if you'd like to hear more about these new laws. But my point is that much of what the Legislature does never makes the headlines. The child-neglect reforms and Family Care Act that I describe inside are further examples.

If you have any questions, or want to speak your mind on an issue, you can reach me quickly through any of the phone numbers and addresses on this page. I'd like to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Mary Lou Dickerson

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## Breaking the gridlock

After years of political gridlock on transportation, the Legislature took major steps toward solutions for the Alaskan Way Viaduct and other urgent needs. I do regret that key funding issues were pushed ahead to the November election. I voted to solve the problem in Olympia. But the plan I supported is the same one that will appear on the ballot. It provides:

- \$450 million for the Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seattle Sea Wall. We'll need local money to complete the project, but this huge state contribution greatly reduces local costs (the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, by comparison, will be financed entirely by tolls).
- Strong funding for I-5 choke points and HOV lanes.
- \$681 million for ferry service, including four new auto ferries..
- Major rail improvements from Seattle to Everett to reduce I-5 congestion.

The overall 10-year plan would raise \$7.6 billion, much of it for highway improvements. There is also funding for rail, buses and other transportation alternatives (*see the chart*). Funding would come mainly from a phased-in 9-cent gas tax and a one percent hike in sales taxes on vehicle purchases. In addition to agreeing on this 10-year plan, the Legislature:

- Passed strong transportation efficiency and accountability mandates on the Department of Transportation.
- Enacted a landmark Regional Transportation Plan that will give our region more control over our transportation future. For the first time, voters in King, Snohomish and Pierce County will be able to raise transportation revenues dedicated exclusively to local needs.
- Enacted a Seattle Monorail bill that leaves the decisions on the future of the monorail in the hands of Seattle voters, where it belongs.

Breaking the gridlock that has prevented solutions to the transportation crisis may be the single most important accomplishment of the 60-day session. The future of our economy and quality of life will in large measure depend on the future of transportation in Seattle and Washington.



## A difficult budget

The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and slowing economy, combined with much higher costs for school enrollments and health care duties, created a \$1.5 billion revenue shortfall in the state budget. We addressed the problem without raising property, sales or business taxes. But it was necessary to:

- Impose \$684 million in program cuts and reductions.
- Use \$450 million of the tobacco settlement funding.
- Raise \$88 million in revenues, mainly by closing special-interest tax-loopholes, improving tax-law enforcement, and allowing a new Big Game lottery.
- Use \$325 million from the Emergency Reserve Fund.

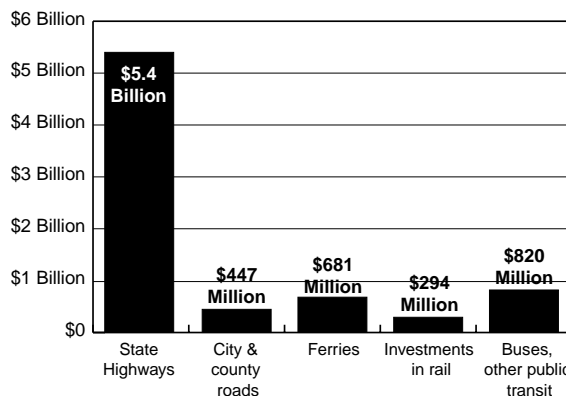
About 900 state jobs were eliminated, and no cost-of-living adjustments were allowed for state employee salaries. Health care benefits for state workers and teachers were also reduced.

There is no painless way to address a \$1.5 billion deficit, and some cuts to education and human services were very difficult for me. But we are extremely fortunate that Appropriations Chairman Helen Sommers found ways to avoid many of the devastating losses expected in January. Given the serious deficit we faced, I'm relieved that:

- The education initiatives remain fully funded.
- Threatened cuts to nursing homes were avoided.
- Local health district funding was saved.

(continued on next page)

Where  
the money  
would go



# 2002 LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

- The Children's Health Insurance Program was protected.
- Safe Babies, Safe Moms funding was saved

All in all, despite required funding increases for school enrollments, corrections and health care, state spending growth was the smallest in 40 years – a full half-billion dollars below the spending limits set by Initiative 601.

## The Family Care Act



Washington state made history in March by granting all private and public sector workers the right to used earned sick leave or other paid time off to care for their seriously ill children, spouses, parents, parents-in-law, or grandparents.

People who work hard all day and go home to care for their seriously ill moms or dads or other loved ones are unsung heros. But it is getting harder and harder to balance work and family care responsibilities. A typical working couple spends 247 more hours on the job compared with ten years ago, and the portion of workers providing elderly care has nearly tripled.

Our new law is believed to be the most comprehensive recognition of family-leave rights in the nation. It doesn't require employers to create leave policies or add leave days, it only requires them to respect the right of workers to use *already earned* leave to care for their family. I proudly sponsored the Family Care Act in the House, and helped the Senate version to become law.

## Child neglect reforms will save children

Most parents involved in serious child neglect are mentally ill or so mired in serious substance abuse that they cannot recognize their children's needs or their own. They are the least likely parents to accept voluntary treatment for the problems that are endangering their children.

Sadly, law enforcement and Child Protective Services were powerless to help until children had *already* suffered profound mental or physical injury. Ineffective response to child neglect has consistently been our state's most common failing in child protection, according to Washington's ombudsman for children and families.

I authored child neglect reforms that allow criminal prosecution when serious neglect creates an imminent and substantial *risk* of serious harm to the child. *But the reforms also allow deferred prosecution if the person charged accepts substance-abuse prevention or other services that reduce future risks to the child.* This will ensure that children in danger get the protection they need, and their parents will get the help they need.

My attempt to reform the civil definition of neglect in order to allow earlier intervention by Child Protective Services did not pass this year, despite strong support from law enforcement and children's advocates. I'll continue to work on it.

**"It is sad to think that our current laws do more to protect the animals we own than the children we raise." *Seattle Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske, supporting my child-neglect bills.***

*(Seattle PI, March 5)*



***I emphasized our responsibility to our parents when I spoke for the Family Care Act.***

## Safe babies, safe moms

As I said earlier, we saved funding for the Safe Babies, Safe Moms pilot programs! I helped start this program, which provides comprehensive services to high-risk, drug-addicted mothers and their babies. We know these services work, as they are based on a national search of the most effective interventions in other states.

## Protecting children against sex offenders

It should be a crime to *knowingly* leave a child in the care of a registered sex offender whose crime or crimes involved children. Now it is. The bill I sponsored to make this inexcusable and dangerous behavior a crime was signed into law by Gov. Locke on March 27. It's hard to believe a parent would knowingly leave a child with a sex offender who previously preyed on children, but witness after witness made clear this common-sense protection was needed.

## School for the deaf

Do you remember the horrifying reports of physical and sexual abuse in the Washington School for the Deaf? Convinced that school administrators were doing too little to address the problems, I proposed that the Department of Social and Health Services should investigate charges of abuse and neglect at the school, and conduct thorough health and safety reviews. The vote for this remedy was unanimous.

## Cop-killer games

Imagine a child playing hour after hour on an intensely graphic video game where points are scored by beating police officers to death. Children are playing these games right now in our community.

A few years ago, I worked with Seattle parents and Mothers Against Violence in America to promote parent education on video-game violence. We were very successful. A rating system that identifies inappropriate games for children is now packaged with every game sold in the USA. Unfortunately, many retailers ignore the ratings.

To reduce this problem, I recently brokered an agreement with the video-game industry. They agreed to train retailers in effective ways to restrict sales of adult-rated games to minors. They also agreed to create and distribute public service announcements to spread the word on game ratings, and to create a national inventory of point-of-sale strategies for protecting children against this toxic material. This was the logical next step in our effort to keep ultra-violent games out of children's hands.



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**2002 Legislative  
Wrap-up**

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